

**Sir William Robert Smith, M.D., D.Sc., F.R.C.S.E.**

SIR WILLIAM ROBERT SMITH was born at Plumstead, Kent, on 28th May 1850. His parents were in very poor circumstances, and though they did their best to give him an education which would serve to improve his lot in life, it was found necessary for him to start work at the early age of thirteen.

He obtained his first post in the Chemistry Department of the Royal Arsenal, Woolwich, and during his spare time continued his studies at the Royal Arsenal Science School. As a result of his earnest application to his work he won, at the age of nineteen, the Gold Medal for Animal Physiology awarded by the Science and Art Department of the Government. By dint of hard work and strict economy, he was able to save enough to take up the study of medicine when he was seventeen years of age. He entered St Bartholomew's Hospital, and two years later passed the Final Examinations.

His first post after obtaining his Medical Qualification was that of House Surgeon at the Brompton Hospital, but he soon realised that, in order to make the progress he desired, he would have to obtain a University degree. As a result of further careful saving, he was ultimately able to take the University course which he had contemplated, and in 1876 he graduated M.B. and C.M. in Aberdeen University.

He then decided to devote himself to the study of Preventive Medicine, and visited the Hygienic Institutes of Paris, Berlin, Vienna, Moscow, and Munich, etc., where he obtained a thorough grasp of the methods in use on the Continent. Returning to this country, he took up special work in Hygiene in University College, London, and later at Edinburgh.

In 1881 he obtained the Diploma in Public Health of the University of Cambridge. Two years later he graduated B.Sc. in the University of Edinburgh, and in 1886 he received the degree of D.Sc. from the same University.

From this date his real active work in the cause of Public Health began, and realising that an intimate knowledge of the relationship between the Law and State Medicine would be of great help in his work, he took the necessary course of legal studies at the Middle Temple, and was called to the Bar in 1888.

In 1889 he was appointed to the Chair of Forensic Medicine and

Toxicology in King's College, University of London, a position which he occupied for some years.

In 1886 he founded the College of State Medicine, in which institution he was appointed Professor of Hygiene and Public Health. After some years, during which important work was carried out, the College became the British Institute of Preventive Medicine, and later the Lister Institute of Preventive Medicine.

In 1889 Sir William was appointed the first Medical Officer of Health to the town of Woolwich, where his genius and untiring energy obtained full scope. Thereafter he received an appointment as Public Analyst to the Boroughs of Woolwich and Windsor, and later he took up the position of Medical Officer of Health to St Albans.

After a hard fight, he was instrumental in establishing, in 1890, the post of Medical Officer of Health to the School Board for London, a post which he himself was the first to hold.

Sir William, in 1874, obtained a Commission in the Army, in which he served till 1913. He returned to the Army on the outbreak of War in 1914, as Specialist Sanitary Officer of the 67th Division of the Southern Army, and on his retirement in December 1917 he was specially thanked by the Secretary of State for War for his valuable services, and had the honour of Knighthood conferred on him in 1919.

Probably Sir William Smith's greatest and happiest achievement was the founding of the Public Health Medical Society, now known as the Royal Institute of Public Health. Commencing in 1886 with a small group of medical men, all possessing qualifications in Public Health, the Society steadily advanced until, in 1897, the Institute came under the patronage of Her Majesty Queen Victoria, and was thereafter known as the Royal Institute of Public Health.

Sir William's work in the cause of Public Health was known all over the world, and his great services to Medicine were recognised by the conferment of honours by almost every country in Europe.

He was elected a Fellow of the Society in 1880, and died on 17th March 1932.

S. S.